

# Adolescents Cosmetic Surgery Psychiatric and Ethical Implications

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## INTRODUCTION

Adolescent cosmetic surgery is not new, but the topic has come to the forefront as a result of recent media attention.

Also the number of adolescents requesting and undergoing cosmetic procedures has increased dramatically over the last decade.

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) estimates that more than 333,000 cosmetic procedures were performed on patients 18 years of age or younger in the United States in 2005, compared to approximately 14,000 in 1996. (The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery News Release, 2006).

So it is important to review the risks and benefits, as well as the need for improved standards for screening and informed consent of such surgeries.

First we should differentiate between reconstructive and cosmetic surgeries. Reconstructive surgery is defined as a procedure to correct a clear abnormality. Reconstructive procedures such as correction of cleft lip or p can provide enormous benefit to children and teenagers. In contrast, cosmetic surgery is defined as surgery to improve a "Normal" appearance, such as reshaping a nose or augmenting breasts. (Sarwer, 2001 and Crerand, et al. 2006)

Teens are often uncomfortable with their evolving bodies.

Distortions in body appearance can lower self-confidence and disrupt social acceptance.

This can result in difficulty with school, aggression, or withdrawal.

Physical appearance has been linked to moral worth. Those considered good-looking are more likely to get married, be hired, get paid more, and be promoted sooner.

Most interventions have been practiced by women, rather than men, who, as a result of their more privileged position in society, have been able to rely more upon their intellectual abilities to achieve respectability.

## Common Cosmetic Plastic Surgical Procedures for Teens:

The following are among the most common surgical procedures performed on those 18 years of age and younger, according to ASAPS statistics:

- **Rhinoplasty:** Nose reshaping is the most requested aesthetic surgical procedure by teens. It can be performed when the nose has completed 90 percent of its growth, which can occur as early as age 13 or 14 in girls and 15 or 16 in boys.
- **Breast reduction:** Breast reduction is frequently performed on girls with overly large breasts that may cause back and shoulder pain, as well as restrict physical activity. Breast reduction usually is delayed until the breasts have reached full development.
- **Correction of breast asymmetry:** Surgery can be performed when one breast significantly differs from the other either in size or shape. Except in cases of asymmetry and post trauma reconstruction, federal regulations prohibit breast implants for those under 18.
- **Treatment of Gynecomastia:** In some teenage boys, excessive breast development (Gynecomastia) can become a significant psychosocial problem. Excess tissue can be removed to achieve a more masculine body contour.
- **Chin augmentation:** Chin augmentation often is performed in conjunction with rhinoplasty to achieve facial balance.